

D O R O T H Y   G A S T O N

Interviewed August 7, 1975

by Dr. Louis D. Silveri

S O U T H E R N   H I G H L A N D S   R E S E A R C H   C E N T E R

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Dorothy Gaston, interviewed by Dr. Louis D. Silveri, August 7, 1975.

Dr. Silveri: In order to get the historical perspective right, when were you born and where were you born?

Dorothy Gaston: Do you think I want to tell the whole nation that?

Silveri: Can you give me an approximation?

Gaston: I won't give you an approximate date; I'll give you an exact date.

Silveri: Very good.

Gaston: Not that I'm terribly enthused.

Silveri: This is just so we can put everything that you're saying in historical context. Of course, you remember the day you were born, right? I mean, you know the day you were born, and the year?

Gaston: I told you, you know, that we lived in this farmhouse above the plant.

Silveri: What was the locality known as then, just Buncombe County? You were in the county?

Gaston: Yes, it was Buncombe County, and it was Lower Hominy. We called it Lower Hominy. I was born in this farmhouse. My father built this farmhouse above the creek and, as I say, there were nine children. I was the third, and I was born in this farmhouse, September 19, 1895. I'm telling you the truth, and I don't mind it a bit.

Silveri: Oh, great, that's great. You said, I think, before that your mother's maiden name was Moore.

Gaston: Lucy Swain Moore.

Silveri: Lucy Swain Moore. Now Swain and Moore are two very well-known names in that community, right?

Gaston: That's right, and my father was Thomas Pinckney Gaston.

Silveri: Thomas Pinckney Gaston. How far back do you know on your father's side? How far back can you go?

Gaston: Well, my father's father was Josiah Perry Gaston. He was in the Civil War, and he was a prisoner of war when the treaty was signed at Appomattox Court House. He was released, and he walked from Appomattox Court House back down to Buncombe County. It took him three weeks, and he brought news of the surrender, and nobody had known it up 'til that time. They hadn't known that the war was over.

He came to the other side of the French Broad River. His family lived in what we call West Asheville now. His clothes were so torn and so dirty and filled with lice and things like that, that he stopped on the other side of the river and called somebody. Then he took his clothes off and bathed in the river. They brought him some fresh clothes to go up to the house. That's what I've heard always, and I think it's the truth. That's about as far back in my father's family --I told you I didn't know too much about that.

Silveri: This story was told to you by your father?

Gaston: Yes, that's right. We've heard it always.

Silveri: Oh, this Civil War person that you were talking about?

Gaston: Yes, Josiah Perry Gaston.

Silveri: Do you remember your father telling you any other stories about the Civil War?

Gaston: Nothing in particular that I can remember. Later they moved out and lived where the Baptist Church is; that was the old Gaston home.

Silveri: Do you know how far back the first Gaston came into the mountains?

Gaston: No.

Silveri: Was your grandfather born in the mountains?

Gaston: Go in there on the dining room table and bring me--I tried to find something there--just bring me that, those papers.

Silveri: Do you need your glasses?

Gaston: I guess I might. This is it. That's a little bit of history that I have.

Silveri: Josiah Perry Gaston is the one you were talking about.

Gaston: That's right.

Silveri: That took part in the Civil War, and he was born in Lancaster County, South Carolina. Maybe I should read this through right now, because I'm sure you don't want to give up this copy.

"Josiah Perry Gaston, son of Thomas Logan and Prudence Dolan Gaston, was born April 30, 1832, in Lancaster County, South Carolina. When he was a small boy, his family moved to West Asheville. He was the grandson of Thomas Gaston, who was born July 18, 1759, and died April 23, 1832. Thomas served in the Revolution as an irregular, and the powder horn used by him is at this time in the possession of one of the descendants in Asheville, North Carolina."

Is that you?

Gaston: No, but I think I can show you a picture of the horn here.

Silveri: "The same horn was used by another member of the family in the War of 1812 and the Civil War. These dates appear on the horn."

Gaston: That's my cousin [who] has that horn. I have a picture of it somewhere here.

Silveri: "On August 23, 1855, J.P. Gaston married Martha Elvira Jones, and they lived in West Asheville on the banks of the French Broad near Carrier Field. In 1873 they moved to Hominy Valley to the farmhouse built by Russell L. Jones, who was the father of Martha Elvira Jones, and which stood on the location where the Enka Baptist Church now stands. There were ten children born to this marriage: Thomas Logan, Russell Jones, Thomas Pinckney" (which was your--)

Gaston: My father.

Silveri: "Parley, Edwin Lamar, Annie (who became Mrs. Charles Ingram), Minnie (who became Mrs. W.E. Fletcher), Mamie (who became Mrs. Thomas Howie, H-o-w-i-e), and Mrs. James H. Brown, Clarence Perry."

Gaston: Clarence Perry's son has that powder horn.

Silveri: Oh, he's the one who has that? Okay.

"Adie (who became Mrs. Wayne Alexander). The only living survivor is Mrs. W.E. Fletcher."

Gaston: She's not living now.

Silveri: "When the war broke out in the spring of 1861, Josiah P. Gaston was a volunteer in the Rough and Ready Guards, which was organized in Asheville under Zeb Vance. This group left Asheville on May 3, 1861, with Zeb Vance as captain and camped out until reaching the railroad, and then went on the train to Statesville, where they went into camp and drilled for two weeks. They went from Statesville to Raleigh and remained there for ten or fifteen days; then to Garysburg, where the Fourteenth North Carolina Regiment was formed. The Rough and Ready Guard made up one company known as Company F. Members of this company participated in the seven days of fighting at Richmond, the battles of Sharpsburg, Fredericksburg, Chancellorsville, Gettysburg, Kelly's Ford, Martinsburg, the Battle of the Wilderness, Winchester, and others.

"After the battle of Seven Pines on July 23, 1862, the battle of Malvern Hills came off, in which Company F suffered a great deal. Among other casualties, J.P. Gaston

Silveri (Cont'd.): 'was wounded and captured, exchanged soon, and promoted to first adjutant in the 64th Regiment.

"Josiah Perry Gaston brought the first news to Asheville of the surrender. This was nearly three weeks after Lee surrendered. Gaston walked all the way from Appomattox Court House and showed his parole. There was still fighting around Asheville. Stoneman was besieging on the south and Kirk's army on the north, and General J.G. Martin went out under a flag of truce and an agreement to give the Federal Troops three days' rations and furnish them on condition that they should not destroy private or public property.

"It has been told by members of this family that when Perry Gaston reached his home after his three weeks' walk from Appomattox his shoes were completely worn out, and his clothing was in such shape from filth and vermin that he stood at the river near his home and called until someone heard him. A change of clothes was brought, and after he bathed in the river he buried the clothes which he had worn before seeing his family.

"Josiah Perry Gaston was a man who was interested in his neighborhood and loved his fellow man. He was a member of the Methodist church and was superintendent of several Sunday schools. He had a very powerful bass voice and loved to sing. Older members of the family can recall how nothing pleased him more than to have a group gather at his home in the evening, where he would lead in the singing of old familiar hymns and songs. He was a Knight Templar in the Masonic Lodge and on two occasions took a trip to California and Utah on business connected with this order. Perry Gaston died May 5, 1890, and was buried in the family cemetery on the hill above his home. Later his body was moved by his family to the Oak Forest Cemetery."

Gaston: Right here.

Silveri: "His father, Thomas Logan Gaston, is buried under the present site of the Central Methodist Church in Asheville, North Carolina.

"J.P. Gaston's war record was taken from an article published in the Asheville Times on October 9 and October 16, 1921. The article was written by N.B. Westall, one of the twelve original members of the Rough and Ready Guards, still alive on that date. Mr. Westall was Third Sergeant of old Company F, 14th North Carolina Infantry, and was appointed one of the company of three to write the Company history."

Silveri: (Cont'd.) Well, since Perry Gaston died in 1890, you never did get to know him.

Gaston: That's right, but I do know that his body was moved to this cemetery right here.

Silveri: Okay. I wanted to ask you: It mentions that when Josiah was a small boy his family moved to West Asheville, which is this area, right? How much acreage did they own when they moved here?

Gaston: I don't know.

Silveri: But it was quite extensive?

Gaston: I don't really know.

Silveri: Okay. Fine.

Gaston: I think it probably was all the family together. Now he married a Jones. He married Martha Jones, and her father owned quite a bit of land in the area. So, taken together that way, I judge it was quite a good deal.

Silveri: Your father was born in West Asheville, right?

Gaston: Yes.

Silveri: When your father was growing up, what opportunities did he have getting an education in this area?

Gaston: Now you know, I don't know. There was a school out here, Sand Hill School, that was established a long time ago, and everybody from around in this section went to that Sand Hill School. Well, I know my father did. Then he married; he was married twice. He and his first wife. . . I don't know how this happened, but they went west, went out to Oregon in the Snake River Valley, and there, there were

Gaston (Cont'd.): three children born. Then his wife died, and he came back here and brought those little children to his mother's home down here. Those children died. There was only one left, and that was my half-sister. Later my father married my mother, and they had eight children.

Silveri: Your father was engaged in farming then, was he?

Gaston: Yes, always.

Silveri: Always.

Gaston: Farming and fruit. He loved fruit, and on his farm he had a lot of fruit trees. He bought some mountain land, a hundred and twenty acres of this. It's called Gaston Mountain. You passed it coming from Enka. He had an orchard of apples, grapes and peaches up on this mountain. He sold it from up there. There were no roads, and they had to take a sled and pack their fruit on the sled and bring it down; then the next morning early, take it to Asheville.

Silveri: Let's talk about your mother's side. You were talking to me before that your mother was a Moore, Swain. Her first name was . . .

Gaston: Lucy Swain Moore. It was originally M-o-r-e. I have a plaque in there that shows where it was M-o-r-e, but now it is always M-o-o-r-e.

Silveri: You said that you can trace that side of the family back to the Revolutionary times, right?

Gaston: Yes, yes.

Silveri: And would you tell that story again when that Moore . . .

Gaston: That was William Moore. Let me see just a minute here.

Gaston (Cont'd.): From Ulster Province, Ireland, and there were three of them that came over here. William Moore was born in 1726 in Ulster Province, Ireland, and he died November 11, 1812. He had two children. He had one son and one daughter. His son was William Moore. I'm getting kind of tangled up here a little bit. No, he had three sons. Let me just tell you as I remember. He had one son named Charles. As I told you, William built this fort down here to live in. At his death, his son Charles lived in this vicinity and he was the one who was very anxious to educate his children. He had no way of educating his children. He was worried about that.

Now this story, as I've always heard it, is that he was lying on a bearskin rug in front of an open fire one night and he was puzzling about the problem of educating his children, when there came a knock on the door. He knew it wasn't an Indian because Indians never knocked. So he said, "Come in." This young man came in, and proved to be a young Presbyterian minister from Maryville, Tennessee. His name was Reverend Jacob Hood, and he was just coming through this section. I never did know exactly where he was going or what he was going to do.

But anyhow, during their conversation and all, he spent the night. He said he would teach the children in the neighborhood. So they got together and established a school here and Reverend Jacob Hood taught that school for some time. That's the way that Sand Hill School was started, and it's been a good school ever since.

Silveri: I think you are talking of a period of time before the Civil War, isn't it?

Gaston: Yes.

Silveri: Let's go back to the first William Moore, and how he happened to find out about the mountains.

Gaston: At the end of the Revolutionary War the Cherokee Indians had been placed in a reservation out here in the western county known as the Cherokee Reservation. They were supposed to stay in this reservation, but they had been (bands of these Indians) going out through the counties and stealing and killing the cattle, and things of that kind. So General Griffith Rutherford sent a band of men to gather up these Indians and take them back to the reservation. Don't know whether they thought they would stay there or not, but anyhow they discerned them.

Now, William Moore was in command of this group of soldiers. There's a very interesting article here that he's written about all that he saw of the mountains while he was going through. You can read it if want it. Anyhow, he thought this section through here was the most beautiful section he had ever seen in his life, and he thought if he got out of this war alive he would come back here and build him a home, which he did.

He built a fort, and he brought some slaves and put them here to take care of it 'til he could go home and get his affairs arranged and bring his family up here. Then later he was given a grant of four hundred acres of land by Governor Richard Caswell, in this section around through here. That's where he lived.

Silveri: Didn't you tell me he was the first white settler in the Hominy Valley?